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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S TRIP TO ADEN AND TAIZ

1. Summary. Ambassador visited the port city of Aden and the city of Taiz October 11-13. Aden and Taiz, the two former capitals of North and South Yemen respectively, are the two largest and most commercially vibrant of Yemeni cities outside the capital Sanaa. NGOs, social activism, commercial expertise, and governmental innovation are a hallmark of the two cities. Ambassador met with Aden Governor Yahya Al-Shu'aibi, Taiz Governor Ahmed Abdullah Al-Hajjari, business people, academics, military officials, community leaders, and women's NGOs to share his goals for his tenure in Yemen and to hear their concerns and ideas. End Summary.

Taiz Water Projects

2. Taiz suffers from a lack of attention from the ROYG. International donors have stepped up to provide much of the needed municipal services. The World Bank has devoted a large part of its 100 million USD water infrastructure development budget to projects in Taiz. Taiz Governor Ahmed Abdullah Al-Hajjari, prominent businessman and local sheikh Ali Mohamed Saeed, and the Executive Director of the Water Authority Adel Magaref raised Taiz's dire water needs with Ambassador, explaining that while underground fresh water reserves in Sanaa can be reached with 300 meter drilling, authorities in Taiz must drill over 1,000 meters to reach the hot, salty, brackish water under the city. This water must be mixed with clean water which is brought from outlying areas, however, the resulting water still does not meet clean drinking water standards. The city of Taiz requested international donor support to improve drinking water in Taiz. Taiz authorities believe building a desalination plant in the ocean side city of Mokha over 100 kilometers over the mountains from Taiz, and building a pipeline to bring in the water, is the only long-term solution.

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MEPI e-Learning Internet Classrooms Inaugurated
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3. In Aden Ambassador inaugurated five Internet-ready computer classrooms that will provide Internet access and other education tools to over 4,000 students in five Aden schools. This MEPI-funded program focuses on providing the information exchange and research tools necessary for building democratic society.

Aden Governor Shu'aibi: Economic and Trade Development

4. Ambassador met with Aden Governor Shu'aibi, widely considered one of the most effective and least corrupt ROYG administrators. Since entering office two years ago, Shu'aibi has improved decaying port and container facilities, repaired pot-holed and crumbling city streets, brought more consistent electricity services to the city grid, improved school buildings and equipment, and significantly decreased graft and corruption in the municipality.

5. Ambassador and Shu'aibi discussed prospects for commercial development through the Aden Free Zone (AFZ) and the Aden Container Terminal (ACT) in the Port of Aden. Both projects have stalled in recent years but show promise of reviving. The Governor praised the U.S. program to develop the Yemeni Coast Guard (YCG), saying that without the presence of coastal security the port would be a commercial wasteland.

Yemen Coast Guard

6. Colonel Saleh Makullah, General Director of the Yemen Coast Guard (YCG), thanked Ambassador for US Coast Guard (USCG) assistance in establishing the Yemeni Coast Guard. After the Limburg attack, very few containers entered the Aden Port, however, said Makullah, since the YCG came into existence a year ago, the Port of Aden has enjoyed 280,000 TEUs through its terminals. Without the presence of coastal security, the Port of Aden could not have improved its security presence, enjoyed the lowering of commercial shipping insurance rates, and seen the return of some commercial shipping traffic.

17. In a major move, in recent weeks two Coast Guard ships moved to the Hodeidah port area to start patrolling on the Red Sea coastline significantly enhancing maritime security in the area.

Ambassador's Meeting with Women Activists

18. Ambassador met with Women's Rights activists in Aden to discuss their work in journalism, child labor, female workers' rights, and democracy building. Organizations represented at the meeting included the Yemen Women's Union, the Salvation Center for Women Care, Arab Foundation for the Support of Women and Juvenile Issues, Center of Human Rights and Democracy for Women, Association for Fighting Child Labor, and the Supreme Council for Maternity and Childhood.

19. Activist Radia Shamshir shared her experience running as an independent candidate in the 2003 parliamentary elections after being passed over as a candidate for her party, the Yemen Socialist Party (YSP). Ambassador noted that despite the many viable candidates, only one woman was elected to Parliament in the last elections. The women described plans for addressing this problem by instituting a quota system, but complained that the ruling General People's Congress (GPC) party pays lip-service to the issue of women's participation in Yemeni political life.

Haifan Village: What a Little Water Can Do

10. Ambassador visited the Haifan Village Water Catchments Project in Haifan Village near Taiz. Ahmed Al-Barakani, the Assistant Manager of the Public Works Project Taiz Branch Office, who helped execute the construction, conducted the tour. The project, funded by 416-B funds, collects water from the rocky hillside and distributes it to irrigation points and water pump sites throughout the village. This project has dramatically raised the standard of living in this 300-inhabitant village by improving productivity so much so that agricultural products, such as sorghum, have replaced qat cultivation as the primary crop. (Note: this success story is an example of what will be lost without 416-B food aid programs in Yemen. The major impact will be on poor rural villages where even a small donation of \$80,000 can bring significant and dramatic improvements to food security, access to water, and prosperity. End Note).
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